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STATE FOR WHA/CAR (RBUDDEN)

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TAGS: [ECON](#) [ENRG](#) [JM](#) [KCOR](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [SNAR](#) [XL](#)  
SUBJECT: JAMAICA: PRIME MINISTER ANNOUNCES ELECTION  
DATE...FINALLY!

REF: A. KINGSTON 705

[1](#)B. KINGSTON 887  
[1](#)C. KINGSTON 1036

Classified By: Ambassador Brenda L. Johnson for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (U) Ending months of speculation and prophecizing, Prime Minister (PM) Portia Simpson Miller (PSM) called faithful People's National Party (PNP) members to rally in Kingston on July 8 ostensibly to introduce the 60 PNP candidates running for election. After hours of standing and waiving PNP flags, PSM finally took the stage and, after introducing each of the 60 candidates, proclaimed "I am the seventh Prime Minister. We have seven national heroes. As such, the date for Nomination Day will be August 7." After dancing on the stage following that announcement, PSM continued on to announce the date of the General Election on August 27 - a date no one predicted.

"Nah Change Nuh Course" Replaced by "Moving Forward Together" as PNP Campaign Theme  
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[1](#)2. (U) The PNP party faithful began arriving in downtown Kingston at approximately 1:00pm to hear PSM announce the election date. Throughout the late afternoon/evening, PNP members were treated to speeches, music, food, beer, and spliffs (marijuana cigarettes). Media and PNP members estimated the crowd size between 125,000 and 176,000; however, police put the number between 100,000 and 120,000. Former PM P.J. Patterson (1992-2006) set the tone for the upcoming election by highlighting the accomplishment of PNP rule over the past 18 years. In particular, he noted that the Government of Jamaica (GOJ) under PNP rule had "removed the yoke and stranglehold" of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), fixed roads, and built up the national reserve. He asked Jamaicans to allow the PNP to continue building on its past accomplishments by electing the PNP once again to another five-year term.

[1](#)3. (SBU) PSM took the stage at approximately 9:00 pm to deliver a 90 minute speech which not only highlighted PNP accomplishments, but also asked the Jamaican electorate to return the PNP to power - and give PSM her own mandate - so Jamaica could continue to "move forward together." This marked a change from the previous PNP slogan of "Nah Change Nuh Course" which has been widely lampooned by the opposition Jamaican Labour Party (JLP) and used in their election advertisements successfully. PSM returned to the promises she made during the recent budget debate (ref A), including the need to increase early childhood education, to protect and develop agriculture - particularly, the

sugar industry, and to reduce crime and corruption. The only specific she offered, however, was a promise to increase the number of police officers by 2,000. As with the budget debate, PSM was long on promises of "goodies" for Jamaicans, but short on specifics of how to accomplish her goals and, more importantly, how to pay for them.

¶4. (U) PSM also spoke emphatically about the need to have a violence-free election. In particular, she pleaded with party members to "not be tempted" into violence. Stating again and again that "the PNP is the party of peace and love. Portia's about peace and love," PSM asked her supporters to not engage in any violence - even if they are provoked by members of the JLP. She reiterated this message one last time at the end of the rally as party members were heading home by reminding them that "if you are provoked, call the police."

¶5. (U) Finally, PSM announced that the PNP will cease all campaign activities beginning July 31 through August 6. August 1 is Emancipation Day and August 6 is Independence Day. PSM called upon all Jamaicans to forget all party affiliation and join with each other that week as Jamaicans. It is doubtful the JLP will heed that call.

#### Jamaican Labour Party (JLP) Reacts to Announcement

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¶5. (U) Opposition Leader Bruce Golding welcomed the announcement of the election date, but questioned the length of time (nearly one month) between the announcement and Nomination Day. Golding noted that there was "no precedent" for an extended campaign period in Jamaica. He suggested that the PNP is still "afraid" of not winning the

election, but was under enormous public pressure to set the date; consequently, PSM attempted to lengthen the campaign period to try and shore up support throughout the island. Overall, however, JLP members were happy with the announcement as they jumped up and down, hugged each other, and started shouting "Bruce" shortly after the date was announced. The JLP is expected to release their election manifesto this week in preparation for the election.

Comment:

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¶6. (C) Both major political parties are well-accomplished at busing people in from all over the island for mass rallies. This rally, however, was strangely different. The crowd seemed tired and unenthusiastic. In fact, as cameras focused on members of the crowd, there were few smiles, looks of utter disinterest, and protracted yawns. While there were numerous party members waving flags, the crowd only seemed to perk up when the music was turned up. PSM also appeared less enthusiastic and her much famed charisma was lacking (this was noticed by the press as well). She appeared fatigued and delivered her remarks as if she were reading a technical manual and not as the leader of the PNP calling the party faithful to arms. Her constant reiteration of "moving forward together" seemed designed to remove "nah change nuh course" from the political lexicon as the JLP has successfully used that phrase in their campaign ads juxtaposed against the laundry list of what the PNP, according to the JLP, has actually accomplished: deteriorating roads, a three-fold increase in crime, a sky-rocketing national debt, etc. The PNP has also faced difficulty with fielding candidates that rank and file PNP members find acceptable (ref B). Acknowledging this, PSM admonished the crowd with "A vote for the PNP candidate in the constituency is a vote for Portia." Finally, after the date was announced, the PNP faithful immediately started moving towards the exits - despite PSM's plea to stay for a few more announcements. The mass exodus while PSM was still speaking was truly

strange.

¶17. (C) Patterson's list of accomplishments can only be described as baffling. While the removal of the IMF from Jamaica was seen as a victory for national sovereignty, sourcing funds from Wall Street - with attendant high interest rates - will certainly lead to repayment difficulties in the long term. Roads, too, are less of a PNP accomplishment than a shining example of GOJ ineptitude (remember the 2002 campaign slogan: "Pot Hole Free by 2003" - not so much). The much-lauded "Highway 2000" project has resulted in the building of only two segments in 7 years with little to no progress in connecting the entire island. And while the GOJ constantly points to this project as an example of infrastructure improvement, they fail to mention the deteriorating road conditions throughout the island - including rural and intracity roads, some of which were washed away during last year's rainy season and have yet to be rebuilt. Finally, the increase in the Net International Reserves (NIR) has been accomplished largely by the success of the tourist sector as well as remittances. Both are largely outside of the control of the GOJ. What the PNP has consistently failed to mention is that despite the increase in NIR, the national debt currently hovers at 132 percent of the GDP - a figure most experts agree is outrageously high.

¶18. (C) The choice for election date - and the long wait to get there - is equally baffling. Golding may well be correct in his assessment that the PNP is afraid they will lose the election, but needed to set a date. The long wait will give the PNP time to do more ground-level campaigning constituency by constituency. PSM argued that the long wait was to allow Parliament to enact a specific bill which criminalizes open voting. Open voting occurs when a voter shows his/her ballot (before sealing it) to the party representatives in the polling division. The practice has been utilized as a way for individual voters to protect themselves from retribution from a local party boss. By showing the ballot, they can prove that they did vote for the "correct" party.

¶19. (C) Golding's visible annoyance at the unexpectedly late August election date may reflect concern that the long campaign period may stretch his party's finances. He told the UK High Commissioner last week that he worried his party might run out of money if the election were not called soon.

¶10. (C) A more magical explanation may involve the much-heralded number seven. The election date was originally anticipated to be called on July 7 (07/07/07) - a magical number in numerology (a belief PSM adheres to). Once that date was ruled out, the date of 07/27/07 was widely speculated. August 27 seems oddly out of place - and the long wait to get there even odder. However, between the July 8 announcement and the August 27 date, seven weeks will have passed. Thus, PSM will Nominate on the seventh day, wait seven weeks between announcing the election and holding the election, and hold the election on the 27. Not being an expert in numerology and other superstitious beliefs, poloff can only speculate that the choice of dates and the waiting period is indeed "special."

¶11. (C) More interesting, however, is the fact that the elections will occur shortly after the start of the new school year. One of the JLP's primary campaign promises is to remove all school fees in order to make sure all Jamaicans children are able to attend (ref C). That campaign promise may well weigh heavily on the minds of voters as they cast their ballot - and review the expenditures they just made to put their children in school.

JOHNSON